

Site name: Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill **Unitary Authority/County:** Luton

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Local Planning Authority: Luton Borough Council

National Grid reference: TL071213 **Area:** 41.17 ha

Ordnance Survey sheet: 1:50,000: 166 **Notification date:** 13 October 2020

Reasons for notification:

Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill is of special interest for its nationally important lowland calcareous grassland and population of great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*.

General description:

Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill SSSI is an area of unimproved and semi-improved calcareous and neutral grasslands, with extensive mixed scrub, secondary woodland and ancient woodland, on a north-facing chalk scarp on the western outskirts of Luton. The site is surrounded on three sides by urban development and is bordered to the west by the M1 motorway.

The site supports an important example of lowland calcareous grassland with a characteristic downland flora. The species composition varies throughout the site as a result of topography and management history. The grassland is mainly dominated by upright brome *Bromopsis erecta* with frequent quaking-grass *Briza media* and fescues *Festuca* spp., occasional cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and rare occurrences of yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and tall fescue *Festuca arundinacea*.

A wide range of characteristic chalk grassland plants are present through the grassland, such as glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa* and field scabious *Knautia arvensis*. The diversity of calcareous plants also includes dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* and hoary plantain *Plantago media*.

Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill SSSI supports an important population of the Nationally Rare great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*. Great pignut is an umbelliferous plant of limey soils that has declined in Great Britain as a result of agricultural intensification. This site supports the largest known population of great pignut in Great Britain.

In addition, the site contains mosaics of neutral grassland, mature mixed scrub and broadleaved woodland habitats. Collectively, the mosaic of habitats at the site supports a large population of slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and locally important populations of invertebrate species, including butterflies such as gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and chalk hill blue *Polyommatus coridon*.